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Author(s): Jaesung Ryu

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## A Theoretical Background for the Rise of Social Trinitarianism: *Schleiermacher and His Reaction to Kantianism*

Jaesung Ryu

*Seoul Theological University  
Bucheon, South Korea*

**ABSTRACT:** Over the past century, Christian theology has developed Social Trinitarianism to construct a kataphatic discourse about God's mystery and a more specific and contextual way of exploring the Trinity in the realms of human life and history. In doing so, it has made its own contribution to starting a new avenue for the theological exploration of God's mystery. This essay begins with a basic definition of this social (or interpersonal) model of the Trinity. It then leads to an exploration of Schleiermacher's doctrine of the Trinity, particularly how he reclaims and reconstructs the mystery of the Triune God in opposition to Kantianism. The purpose of this study is to provide Schleiermacher (more specifically, his response to Kantianism) as a theoretical background for the rise of Social Trinitarianism.

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Social Trinitarianism is a theological discourse that conceives of the immanent life of the Triune God as “essentially relational, ecstatic, fecund, and alive as passionate love.”<sup>1</sup> A number of contemporary Christian theologians such as Catherine LaCugna (Catholic tradition), John Zizioulas (Orthodox tradition), Jürgen Moltmann (Protestant tradition), and Leonardo Boff (Liberation theology) are generally regarded as representatives of Social Trinitarianism. At the heart of their works are

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 1.

their emphases on a social unity of mutual, reciprocal indwelling of the three divine persons rather than a solitary unity of substance or identical subjects. And they engage to a greater extent the Christian tradition in exposing the doctrine enlisted to support particular kinds of divine/human community.<sup>2</sup> Although there is a widespread concern in contemporary theology about the “danger of anachronism when [it is] read into patristic conceptions,”<sup>3</sup> the fact nonetheless remains that this picture of God as three divine persons who relate to each other in love and communion is a remedy for the Greek Neoplatonic notion that thinks of God as the universal monarch of heaven, and a correction to the ontological monism of Scholastic philosophy, which regards God as one, distant, self-sufficient, and invulnerable. The recent trinitarian discourse (especially of LaCugna, Zizioulas, Moltmann, Boff), which finds resonance to some degree in feminist theology, is no longer tied to a Greco-Roman patriarchal and imperialist structure, nor is it cooped up in an abstract and speculative Neo-Scholastic framework.<sup>4</sup> It has instead championed social (or interpersonal) models, providing a rich resource for drawing out the practical (or pastoral) ramifications of trinitarian theology.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 207.

<sup>3</sup> In the face of contemporary theological social interpretations of the Trinity, the patristic scholar Andre de Halleux cautions that the use of concepts such as intersubjectivity and dialogue (along with modern subjectivity) for understanding the Trinity has the “greater danger of anachronism when read into patristic conceptions.” André De Halleux, “Personnalisme Ou Essentialisme Trinitaire Chez Les Pères Cappadociens? Une Mauvaise Controverse (Suite),” *Revue théologique de Louvain*, no. 3 (1986): 290, quoted from Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “Schleiermacher’s Understanding of God as Triune,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacqueline Mariña (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 186.

<sup>4</sup> Anne Carr, for instance, appreciates that God conceived as a perfect and egalitarian sociality embodies feminist ideals, such as cooperation, mutuality, reciprocity, and genuine diversity. This conception, according to Carr, “provides women with an image and concept of God that entails qualities that make God truly worthy of imitation, worthy of the call to radical discipleship that is inherent in Jesus’ message.” Anne E. Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women’s Experience* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 156.

<sup>5</sup> Biblically, this interpersonal, this social model is reflected in Jesus’ high priestly prayer in John 17:21: “May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us.” Here the Trinity exhibits an explicitly relational focus, envisaging out of God’s eternal and essential interrelating (or interpenetrating) an equal and mutually subsistent community where, following the Council of Florence (1438-45), no person “either precedes the others in eternity, or exceeds them in greatness, or supervenes in power,” quoted from Declan Marmion and Rik van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 206.

Social Trinitarianism became increasingly popular at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. But how did Social Trinitarianism come to emerge in Christian theology as a viable model for conceptualizing the tension of God's unity-in-distinction? In fact, this model was literally inconceivable in the classical system intended to stand on either the metaphysical framework of St Augustine and Thomas Aquinas or the apophatic tradition of Orthodox (or more broadly, Eastern Christian) thought.<sup>6</sup> Unlike contemporary Social Trinitarian theology, which often involves the implications of the doctrine for different areas of life, traditional treatments of the Triune God focus on the following two questions (which do not necessarily entail that implication): The first question is whether one begins with the Oneness or Threeness of God, and the second one concerns how one explicates the Trinity in relation to the Unity.<sup>7</sup> In the history of Christian theology, the answer to these questions has been elaborated, developed, and expanded either by the essentialist approach, popularly identified with Latin/Western theology, or the personalist approach, as found in Greek/Eastern theology.<sup>8</sup> Here the problem that this essay intends to point out is not to determine whether the former is at the forefront of theological reflection, taking precedence over the latter — or vice versa. It is much more concerned with the disjoining of *oikonomia* and *theologia*, similar to that pointed out by LaCugna through her main critique against tradition: the doctrine of the Trinity is best explained through a tapestry of divine sociality, which well encapsulates the reality of a living God who is not beyond the world or over against the world but lives in, among, for us as Being-in-relation-to-

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<sup>6</sup> Each of these classical currents of thought remains largely in the abstract discourse of God's inner life. And neither of these classical currents of thought, as Leonardo Boff well points out, runs the risk of linking the doctrine of the Trinity with the historical realm of human life or community, so as not to undermine the ontological import of the mystery of the trinitarian mystery. Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 16-8. See also Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 51-2.

<sup>7</sup> Fiorenza, "Schleiermacher's Understanding of God as Triune," 174.

<sup>8</sup> Théodore de Régnon's historical studies of trinitarian doctrines assumed that the personalism of the Greek/Eastern theology emphasized the priority of the person over essence, while the Latin/Western essentialism subjugated the person to essence. For a further discussion of a widely held hermeneutical problems caused by de Régnon's paradigm, see Michel René Barnes, "De Régnon Reconsidered," *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995): 51-79; and idem, "Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 237-50.



another.<sup>9</sup> How, then, could Social Trinitarianism be discussed in Christian theology? Where on earth or by whom did the occasion come about? This present work has its significance in terms of answering these questions and, above all, adding a sort of archaeological explanation to the course of the discussion.

## Schleiermacher and His Reaction to Kantianism

Discussion about the Trinity in the nineteenth century and beyond was mainly indebted to the philosophies of German Idealists such as Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Schelling, and G.W.F. Hegel.<sup>10</sup> These thinkers fashioned a new landscape for the doctrine and introduced a set of questions and concerns that previous generations had not considered. “The doctrine of the Trinity, taken literally, has no practical relevance at all, even if we think we understand it; and it is even more clearly irrelevant if we realize that it transcends all our concepts. [...] The same holds true of the doctrine that one person of the Godhead became human [and] the stories of the resurrection and ascension of this God-man.”<sup>11</sup> Probably Kant’s affirmation best illustrates the cultural life and philosophical challenges that faced the Christian community regarding the doctrine of the Trinity in the post-Enlightenment period. Following the lead of German Idealists, we find nineteenth and twentieth-century theologians orienting toward *history* and *critical reason* and thus asking hitherto unraised questions about God, such as “Does God become? If so, does God become actual through a relationship with the cosmos? Is God free? Is the cosmos an element of God’s being? Is God’s knowledge of the cosmos an act of self-consciousness? In what sense is God personal? Does personality imply

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<sup>9</sup> LaCugna concludes that the quest into the mystery of God must be made *theologia oikonomia*, critically assessing that “an ontological distinction between God *in se* and God *pro nobis* is, finally, inconsistent with biblical revelation.” That is, the economy of salvation (*oikonomia*) is not only the beginning but also the end of our knowledge of God (*theologia*). LaCugna, *God for Us*, 6; 22-4.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel M. Powell, *The Trinity in German Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 104-41.

<sup>11</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties* (New York: Abaris Books, 1979), 65-7.

finitude?”<sup>12</sup> All of these questions were relatively new in theological history or were asked in new ways. Consequently, modern Protestant and Catholic Christian theologians treated the doctrine differently, with different attitudes, ranging from neglect to reinterpretation in the theological discourse.

A good example is the well-known inclusion of the doctrine in the concluding postscript to the *Christian Faith* by Friedrich Schleiermacher, with the remark that the doctrine of the Trinity (and other dogmatic propositions thereof) are “accounts of the Christian religious affections set forth in speech” and as such cannot say anything about the being of God *per se*.<sup>13</sup> Born in 1768 and settled in Berlin in the 1790s, Schleiermacher came to maturity in a world marked by the ascendancy of Kant in philosophy and a tradition of rationalist thinkers in theology. In this setting, it was necessary for this modern father to carve out his own intellectual milieu. He did so through the careful study of the critical philosophy of Kant, while immersing himself in the works of Plato. The process was largely aided through his reading of Jacobi on Kant and Spinoza.<sup>14</sup> But as that process went on toward the discussion of the Trinity and other theological elements, Schleiermacher fixed a clear distinction between himself and them (Kant and Spinoza)<sup>15</sup> and critically assumed the anti-speculative and mystical aspects of Pietism, which recognizes the apophatic

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<sup>12</sup> Samuel M. Powell, “Nineteenth-Century Protestant Doctrines,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Gilles Emery, O.P. and Matthew Levering (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 269.

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (New York: T&T Clark, 1999), §15, 76. All future references to *The Christian Faith* will be listed as *CF* followed only by the paragraph number and page.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Crouter, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 5.

<sup>15</sup> A case in point is Schleiermacher’s use of feeling of absolute dependence. This unique form of religious feeling refers to a mechanism by which Schleiermacher consistently upholds the asymmetrical relation of dependence between God and the world. With regard to its asymmetric property, which is incompatible with the Spinozian pantheistic formula “One and All,” it can be said that this mechanism makes a clear distinction between Schleiermacher and Spinoza—though the former famously praised the latter in his *Speeches*, and echoes of the latter’s understanding of God as *Natura naturans*, that is, a dynamic, not static view of Being that aids Schleiermacher in tightening the “relation between the finite being of the world and the infinite being of God” (see *CF*, §35, 140). It can also be said that in relation to its relational nature, which is incompatible with the Kantian noumenal/phenomenal distinction, it draws a line between Schleiermacher and Kant. For a fuller comparison of Schleiermacher and Spinoza, see Julia Lamm, *The Living God: Schleiermacher’s Theological Appropriation of Spinoza* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 121-3; 216-28.

contours of the divine life as kataphatically revealed by the person of Jesus Christ and his Spirit in the Church.

Pietism is generally regarded as an ecumenical movement that originated in modern Germany in the late-seventeenth century with the work of Philipp Spener. As a Romantic response to the Enlightenment, this ecumenical movement spread from Germany to Switzerland and the rest of German-speaking Europe. Although the lack of a uniformly accepted definition of Pietism has hampered its study in some ways, it has largely been affirmed by recent scholars that Pietism is an “intellectual and spiritual movement” that secures religion against modernity and insulates its living and historically contextualized experience of God within the realm of *Gefühl* (feeling).<sup>16</sup>

The most significant feature of this line of thought (that Schleiermacher tries to retrieve from Kantianism) is that human experience is not synonymous with the claims of pure reason. But this does not necessarily mean that such experiences are synonymous with emotion. In fact, none of the terms referring to *Gefühl* in paragraphs 32 to 35 of the *Christian Faith*, such as “piety,” “pious feeling,” “pious immediate self-consciousness,” “consciousness of being absolutely dependent,” and “God-consciousness,” are synonym for emotion or any particular affection such as joy or sorrow. They are rather synonymous with an awareness or a conscious state that Kant might call “transcendental.”<sup>17</sup> “If considered purely in itself,” this awareness is merely a “modification of feeling, or of immediate self-consciousness.”<sup>18</sup> But Schleiermacher goes a step further than this secular, non-religious ‘psychological’ approach. That is to say, he

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<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Strom, Hartmut Lehmann, and James Van Horn Melton, eds., *Pietism in Germany and North America 1680-1820* (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 33-50; 163-82.

<sup>17</sup> Although Schleiermacher rejects the Kantian restriction of religious claims, he nevertheless adopts Kant’s practice of transcendental reasoning. One caveat should be kept in mind when reading this adoption by Schleiermacher. As is well known, Schleiermacher’s philosophical focus was to overcome Kant, especially his “Erscheinung” and “Ding an sich” dualism. Accordingly, Schleiermacher does not uncritically accept Kant but incorporates a pietistic dimension to his use of the term “transcendental.” In the *Kurze Darstellung des Spinozistischen Systems*, Schleiermacher clarifies this point by saying that the transcendental experience is the immanent and transcendent experience of God. William Alexander Johnson, *On Religion: A Study of the Theological Method in Schleiermacher and Nygren* (Leiden: Brill, 1964), 19-21.

<sup>18</sup> *CF*, §3, 5. For more introduction to this concept, see Louis Roy, “Consciousness According to Schleiermacher,” *The Journal of Religion* 77, no. 2 (April 1997), 217-32.

has never failed in reconciling such religious and mystical experiences with an idea of God as the *Whence* of existence, or that on which every creature is absolutely dependent.<sup>19</sup> Thus this awareness, this conscious state is not an emotion or series of affections, nor is it simply an experience of utter dependency in and by itself. It is an experience of the positive, living encounter of God who is *pro nobis* and always with us. It is, in other words, the Christian reception (in the form of pious *Gefühl*) of the divine economic activity in Christ and the Spirit.

Using such an interpretative reformulation of Pietism, Schleiermacher succeeds in some way in escaping the ironclad logic of the Kantian dilemma, which claims that, if God be God, then He cannot be part of our world of experience or an object of theoretical reflection (meaning, God is beyond pure reason). In the end, however, Schleiermacher seems to join Kant in resting his case on an equally humanist line of reasoning. Thus Gordon J. Spykman writes,

He, too, shifted the norm for theology from the God-side to the man-side. Human response was made normative for dogmatics. This leaves us with an nonrevelational base for religion. By defining “religious feeling” as naturally present to human consciousness, Schleiermacher opens the floodgates to the primacy and autonomy of human experience. [...] The result is, instead of theology, a form of anthropology.<sup>20</sup>

But is this a fair assessment of Schleiermacher? On the one hand, he seems to have brought human experience to the center of theological reflection. But what he really thought about was not just an Enlightenment approach to the human experience, but a Pietistic approach to the divine agency acting within the realm of creatures, which he calls “divine causality” in paragraphs 51.1 to 51.2 of the *Christian Faith*.<sup>21</sup> In other words, Schleiermacher attempts to circumvent the Kantian dichotomy through the lens of Pietism. The result is, instead of the Kantian agnostic separation, a

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<sup>19</sup> *CF*, §4, 12-8. Fiorenza, “Schleiermacher’s Understanding God as Triune,” 171-88.

<sup>20</sup> Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 44-5.

<sup>21</sup> See footnote 38 of this essay.

pre-Rahnerian rule of transcendental continuity, which ensures one can view transcendence and immanence as movable points on the same spectrum, with no substantial breaks between them.

His book *Christian Faith* is where Schleiermacher best portrays this pre-Rahnerian rule as a conceptual framework for trinitarian thinking. Here one must keep in mind, however, an important caveat, that Schleiermacher's discussion of that conceptual framework was not limited to the last two or three paragraphs but was developed and established throughout the *Christian faith*. To put it in another way, one cannot gain a fuller grasp of his trinitarian theology without attending to such a reasoning that has been developed and become known as "Rahner's Rule": "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity."<sup>22</sup> Thus, it is necessary to discuss the first part of *The Christian Faith*, which is as significant as the concluding section that provides equally important (but in itself insufficient) resources for our comprehension of his trinitarian theology.

Identifying the relationship of Christian doctrine to pious *Gefühl*, Schleiermacher begins the *Christian Faith* by saying that "Christian doctrines are accounts of the Christian religious affections set forth in speech."<sup>23</sup> Doctrine then is not an abstract consideration of the nature of reality but an inward religious feeling that has been formalized and externalized in language. It constitutes an archaeological transition from the inward religious feeling which may not be specific, ordered or synthesized, to definitive or systematic language. This means that doctrines in all their forms cannot be seen as something separate to the inward religious feeling but must instead be seen as rooted in this inward religious feeling, or more precisely, the conceptually precise, verbal formulations of it. In this respect, they are not to be precedents, but the secondary products derived from it. Consequently, no doctrine precedes Christian life and experience, though they function as norms of faith. As such no doctrine constitutes an absolute and infallible book of divine revelation.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph F. Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 22.

<sup>23</sup> *CF*, §15, 76.

<sup>24</sup> Powell, "Nineteenth-Century Protestant Doctrines," 270.

Armed with this theory of doctrine and language, Schleiermacher now proceeds to explore Christian preaching. But his point remains unchanged: Christian doctrine is not an abstract activity (pronouncement) unrelated to lived experience, but a specific mode of language that expresses the piety of Christians; more specifically, that which preaches, teaches, and provides as living examples the redemption of God, accomplished by Christ and experienced in the form of *feeling* through the Spirit indwelling in the Church. Schleiermacher opines: Christian preaching itself has as its content “the state of blessedness which is to be effected through the means ordained by Christ.”<sup>25</sup> But this preaching does not remain a unitary (mode of speech) *verbum* as the church develops, but is divided into three types of speech, “which provide as many different forms of doctrine: the poetic, the rhetorical..., and finally the descriptively didactic.”<sup>26</sup> Among the three types of speech that correspond to the three different forms of doctrine, it is the third type of speech, the descriptively didactic, that characterizes dogmatic propositions.<sup>27</sup> This descriptively didactic speech aims at the highest possible degree of certainty, while the other two types of speech are prone to contradiction, which can be resolved only by reference back to the “original utterances of Christ (a thing which can in very few cases be done directly)” and by making the descriptively didactic expression as specific as possible, which consists in part in eliminating poetic or rhetorical elements.<sup>28</sup> Such an undertaking brings about an important mark pertaining to dogmatics, that it is not merely ecclesiastical but also scientific. Indeed, Schleiermacher refers to this mark as saying that the dogmatic proposition has a twofold value: the ecclesiastical and the scientific.<sup>29</sup> “The ecclesiastical value of a dogmatic proposition consists in its reference to the religious emotions themselves.” “The scientific value of a dogmatic proposition depends [...] upon the specificity of its concept and of their connection with each other.” Yet the dogmatic task is not science *per se*. Although it may bear some similarity

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<sup>25</sup> *CF*, §15.2, 78.

<sup>26</sup> *CF*, §15.2, 78.

<sup>27</sup> *CF*, §16, 78-83.

<sup>28</sup> *CF*, §16.3, 80-1.

<sup>29</sup> *CF*, §17, 83.

with regard to form, the dogmatic task is distinct from science, or logic, or what Schleiermacher calls “speculative activity,” with regard to content.<sup>30</sup> For the dogmatic propositions are derived from the inward religious feeling (i.e., all doctrinal pronouncements are grounded in religious experience), but the speculative activity has as its task the “contemplation of existence,” and is derived from logical considerations or from the work of natural sciences.<sup>31</sup>

Accordingly, Schleiermacher speaks against the merely speculative character of traditional doctrines, which bears no relation to the ground of doctrine (i.e., the sense of spiritual dependence on Christ and the Spirit). He then offers, at the conclusion of the *Christian Faith*, a reformulation of the Trinity that assigns a certain logical and epistemological primacy to relational/soteriological categories (e.g., mission, temporality, deus ad extra) rather than substantial (ontological) categories (e.g., procession, eternity, deus ad intra).

Did this modern father let Christian theology neglect the Trinity? Or did he help it attempt a reinterpretation of the Trinity? Claude Raymond Welch, who was a historical theologian specializing in Karl Barth and nineteenth-century theology, certainly agrees with the former position. In his book *In This Name: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology*, Welch was critical of Schleiermacher’s doctrine of the Trinity as well as other elements of his theology. Schleiermacher’s motive, he writes, is the “conviction that the doctrine in itself is an unnecessary and unwarranted addition to the faith.”<sup>32</sup> More critical remarks can also be found in Robert W. Jenson who echoes Johann Adam Möhler, one of the leading members of the Roman Catholic Tübingen School in the early-nineteenth century. In *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel*, Jensen accuses Schleiermacher of being an Arian who “just drops” the inherited proposition of the Trinity. “[His] specifically Christian apprehension,” Jensen continues, “does not reach to the basic understanding of God at all” because he has “a particularly simple-minded

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<sup>30</sup> *CF*, §16.3, 81; and *idem*, §87.3, 360-1.

<sup>31</sup> *CF*, §16.3, 81-82.

<sup>32</sup> Claude Raymond Welch, *In This Name: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1952), 5.

form of the disastrous old distinction between natural and revealed theology.”<sup>33</sup> Like the widespread consensus in Neo-Orthodoxy (also known as “crisis” or “dialectical” theology in Europe and North America) regarding the criticism that Schleiermacher relegates the doctrine of the Trinity to an appendix to Christian theology, both Welch and Möhler criticize Schleiermacher’s mistreatment of the Trinity and ignorance of its importance and function to the rest of the doctrine, the church practice, and practical daily life.

However, in Christine Helmer’s view, more specifically in what Helmer called “another” story about the Trinity in the history of post-Kantian thought, we see quite a different plot.<sup>34</sup> Here the doctrine of the Trinity was never eclipsed by the Kantian epistemological agnosticism. Nor was it marginalized by Schleiermacher’s reformulation of God in the *Christian Faith*. Schleiermacher, at least in this “another” story, did not marginalize the Trinity. But he rather attempted a reinterpretation of Trinity in relation to Enlightenment; more specifically, he attempted to find the appropriate models that would conceptualize the antinomy of God’s unity-in-distinction in post-Kantian systems. Thus, contrary to the scorching criticism of Schleiermacher’s understanding of Trinitarian doctrine (as seen in the case of Welch and Möhler), Helmer makes a conclusion similar to that of Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, who claims that Schleiermacher does not deliver a death blow to the doctrine of the Trinity but develops it through the entirety of *Christian Faith*.<sup>35</sup>

Presumably, one will give legitimacy to Helmer’s (and Fiorenza’s) positive assessments of Schleiermacher, provided he or she fairly considers an inflexion point derived from (1) Schleiermacher’s discussion of the central difference between Sabellius and what has become the official church doctrine;<sup>36</sup> (2) the religious and mystical experience of God which

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<sup>33</sup> Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 134.

<sup>34</sup> Christine Helmer, “Between History and Speculation: Christian Trinitarian Thinking After the Reformation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, ed. Peter C. Phan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 149-67. See also Christine Helmer, *Theology and the End of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 2-3; 161-2.

<sup>35</sup> Fiorenza, “Schleiermacher’s Understanding of God as Triune,” 185-7.

<sup>36</sup> The central difference is this: what Schleiermacher labels as Sabellian affirms that “the Trinity refers to God as ruling general activity as Father, as redeeming as Christ and through the Son, and as sanctifying as Spirit,” whereas the official church doctrine affirms that



Schleiermacher intended to preserve, on the basis of Pietism, against the post-Enlightenment challenges like Kant's epistemological agnosticism;<sup>37</sup> (3) Schleiermacher's attempt to link the economy of salvation with the immanent Trinity through the term 'divine and finite causality';<sup>38</sup> and (4) the affirmation, in paragraphs 164 to 169 of the *Christian Faith*, of three divine distinctions-in-relation as the essence of God: divine causality, love, and wisdom.<sup>39</sup> While contributing to re-orienting what Trinitarian discourse is all about, the inflexion point (derived from the four discussions above) enables us to capture more adequately the faithfulness of Schleiermacher's theology to distinctively Christian (orthodox) ways of thinking. His theology is not sufficiently understood by means of a naïve investigation into the simple fact that he placed his treatise on the Trinity at the end of the *Christian Faith*. A fuller grasp of his work in the *Christian Faith* is achieved by attending to his reforming work on traditional elements of Christian thought; his dialogue with Enlightenment and Romantic influences; his treatment of divine (primary) and finite causality; and his understanding of the divine life/activity as divine causality, love, and wisdom. These aspects of Schleiermacher's theology do not spell the doctrine's death. They rather set the stage for a novel form of Trinitarianism that paves a way toward its

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"the Trinity is something in the Godhead, interior and original, independent of the divine activity." The Godhead is, therefore, Father, Son and Spirit in eternity. "If this is the whole difference," Schleiermacher insists that "the charge of irreligiosity against Sabellius can be challenged and the Sabellian view should be considered alongside the Athanasian view as a possibility for the future development of the notion of the Trinity." Interestingly, such a claim does not develop to the extent that would give legitimacy to the criticism often raised against his major work of theology, *The Christian Faith*. Fiorenza, "Schleiermacher's Understanding God as Triune," 174.

<sup>37</sup> Critically accepting/integrating Kant's agnosticism and Pietism's empirical insights, Schleiermacher presents an innovative conception of God that God is intimately (and immanently) engaged in the work of creation and redemption, while at the same time transcending the world. Helmer, "Between history and speculation," 149-67.

<sup>38</sup> In paragraphs 35.1 to 35.3 and 51.1 to 51.2 of the *Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher argues that the divine causality should be understood as equivalent in compass to the natural order, which is to say, to the causal order that comprises the whole of finite being. At the same time, divine causality should also be conceived as existing in opposition to finite causality, such that the former cannot simply be reduced to the sum-total of the latter. So God is intimately (and immanently) involved in the operations of creation and redemption, even as God remains other (and transcendent) to that created order. Schleiermacher does not think of God separate from the world. Though God transcends the world, God is omnipresent through a unique form of causality across all of time and space, across the scope of the world. Therefore, divine transcendence and immanence, divine otherness and proximity must be treated in tandem. For a more detailed discussion of 'divine and finite causality', see *CF*, §50-6, 194-232; and Fiorenza, "Schleiermacher's Understanding God as Triune," 176-80; 185-7.

<sup>39</sup> *CF*, §164-9, 723-37.

revitalization, with a new sensibility that regards history as the revelatory locus of God. Indeed, such a fuller grasp of his work leads scholars like Robert Williams to make a very different conclusion from Welch and Jenson: “There is no significant cognitive difference between Schleiermacher’s [...] trinity and the immanent trinity of the tradition when properly qualified.”<sup>40</sup>

So all of these are important discussions and deserve more scholarly attention. But the last of these is the subject of interest in this essay. Because it is worth explaining in more detail with regard to the principle of Social Trinitarianism: *perichoresis/circuminssessio*. Here, in paragraphs 164 to 169 of the *Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher rejects this speculative doctrine of God — insofar as it deals with God as God would be apart from creation — along with its terminology of three “persons” and the internal relations of generation and procession.<sup>41</sup> But he could nonetheless have affirmed divine causality, love, and wisdom as three distinctions-in-relation within the one divine life,<sup>42</sup> and as adequate descriptors of the divine life that encourage just relations within Christian communities and relationships.<sup>43</sup> On the basis of this discussion, Schleiermacher was not only able to maintain the relevance of his theology to traditional elements of Christian thought, but he was also able to revitalize the doctrine of the Trinity against the phenomenal-noumenal barrier of Kantianism that renders trinitarian speculation either impossible or superfluous.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Robert Williams, *Schleiermacher the Theologian: The Construction of the Doctrine of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 154.

<sup>41</sup> Schleiermacher believes that the concept of “person” or “personhood” will likely distort devotion and suggest three centers of consciousness, because it is much too anthropomorphic. Albert Blackwell, “The Antagonistic Correspondence between Sack and his Protégé Schleiermacher,” *Harvard Theological Review* 74, no. 1 (1981): 101-21, 107-8.

<sup>42</sup> After presenting the divine causality as love and wisdom, Schleiermacher writes: “These two attributes, love and wisdom, are of course separable in human life, and this the more easily that owing to the distinction between understanding and will which is essential to man, it is only in a few persons (and never completely even in them) that distinction and the formation of purposes merge in each other. [...] No such dualism can be conceived of in the Divine Essence; hence the two attributes are never separate in any way; they are so entirely one that each may be regarded as being intrinsically contained in the other [*perichoresis*].” *CF*, §165.2, 727. See also Fiorenza, “Schleiermacher’s Understanding God as Triune,” 178-80; and Shelli M. Poe, *Essential Trinitarianism: Schleiermacher as Trinitarian Theologian* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 81-114.

<sup>43</sup> *CF*, §121-5, 560-81. See also Poe, *Essential Trinitarianism*, 171-84.

<sup>44</sup> A similar assessment of Schleiermacher was made quite expressively by Rahner: “a theology à la Schleiermacher [...] quite desires to be an ecclesial theology, meaning the scholarly refection upon the previously given faith of the community, of the Church, as well as, if you will, speaking as a Catholic of the Church’s teaching office. For that reason, then, it also

Given the inflection (derived from the discussion above), it is fair to conclude that the work of Schleiermacher in the *Christian Faith* is far from delivering a death blow to the Trinitarian doctrine. It rather serves as a resource for future doctrinal progress or more precisely, a starting point for modelling the Trinity in a different way than that developed from the age of the church fathers, such as the Cappadocian fathers, St. Augustine, or Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Ages. In fact, Schleiermacher himself makes this point clearer than anyone else: “The position assigned to the doctrine of the Trinity in the present work,” Schleiermacher writes, “is perhaps at all events a preliminary step towards this goal” of reappraising the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>45</sup> Thus it is not difficult to locate a number of unprecedented instances of theological reflection on the Trinity that begin to have a pair of their own coordinates (x, y) on a newly emerging curve starting from this Schleiermacherian inflexion point. Some of these coordinate pairs are asymmetrical to the existing ones, leading to a form of anti-Trinitarianism similar to that of radical reformers such as Michael Servetus (1511-1553) and Faustus Socinus (1539-1604). But the other pair of coordinates takes a somewhat symmetrical approach by looking back to and reconfiguring the resources (especially the Cappadocian or Augustinian-Thomistic traditions) that are deemed suitable for building a new model for the Trinity.

Social Trinitarianism places its own coordinate pair at one point on this Schleiermacherian curve. And it regards the latter, symmetrical approach as its primary approach to the Trinity. As a result, it does not go through the process of simple mimesis (repetition), nor does it work in tandem with the proponents of anti-Trinitarianism. But it starts from the inflexion point; a point derived from the whole discussion of the *Christian Faith* (as mentioned above). That is to say, this Social Trinitarian alternative attempts a reformulation of the Trinitarian doctrine in conjunction with Schleiermacher’s post-Kantian and Pietistic insight that make possible a

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has a connection with the language of the past, which a modern philosopher [Kant] proudly ignores.” Karl Rahner, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews 1965–1982*, ed. Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 312.

<sup>45</sup> *CF*, 172.3, 749.

plausible and powerful reformulation of the relationship between divine transcendence and divine immanence.<sup>46</sup>

But the fact that they have started from the same starting point and discussed the same topic does not guarantee absolute agreement between them. There is a distinction between Schleiermacher and Social Trinitarianism. The most representative is the way they deal with several problems that can arise in preserving the concept of person found in patristic or medieval theology. The implication that can be extrapolated from the modern (Cartesian etc.) concept of person, that the one divine nature can exist as three consciousnesses, could not be acceptable to both Schleiermacher and Social Trinitarians like LaCugna (Catholic tradition), Zizioulas (Orthodox tradition), Moltmann (Protestant tradition), and Boff (Liberation theology). But again, their treatment is really different. While the former rejects traditional terminology and adopts the new trinitarian terms (divine causality, love, and wisdom), the latter finds an alternative way (i.e., the term *perichoresis*) to remain true to the tradition. Despite these differences, however, one cannot dismiss the fact that Schleiermacher's theological methodology played a pivotal role as a starting point for presenting a new, more practical understanding of the Trinity (esp. Social Trinitarianism)—and for developing the Rahnerian principle of inseparability between *oikonomia* and *theologia*.

## Conclusion

All Friedrich Schleiermacher develops a post-Kantian and Pietistic framework against the cultural and philosophical challenges of the post-Enlightenment worldview. The importance of this framework lies in

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<sup>46</sup> The attempt to relativize the Kantian distinction between noumenal and phenomenal realms was not only of Schleiermacher. It was also of his hostile colleague at the University of Berlin G.W.F. Hegel. Both Schleiermacher and Hegel attempt to present a philosophical trinitarian paradigm that connects what Kant in his first *Critique* separates and makes infinitely asymmetric: God and the world. But there is a significant difference in theoretical approaches that these two modern thinkers employ to construct that which later becomes two major exemplars of the modern philosophical and theological system. For a more detailed study of the theoretical relevance and difference between these two modern thinkers and how they affected post-Kantian trinitarian theology, see Helmer, "Between history and speculation," 164-7, and Cyril O'Regan, "The Trinity in Kant, Hegel, and Schelling," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Gilles Emery, O.P. and Matthew Levering (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 254-66.

establishing a theoretical basis—or what I would like to call a pre-Rahnerian rule—that allows Christian theology to be faithful to trinitarianism, even within the Kantian system that would otherwise make the theological debate about the mystery of the Trinity superfluous or at best inconceivable.

Social Trinitarianism, for instance, uses this theoretical basis as its starting point and develops its post-Schleiermacherian discussion of the Trinity. Like Schleiermacher, this alternative trinitarian model has two distinctive features that mark the contemporary renewal in Trinitarian theology: one is to reinterpret traditional elements of Christian thought, and the other is to contribute to underscoring the congruence between the economy of salvation and the transcendental mystery of God. And both of these features aim at unveiling practical implications of the doctrine of the Trinity, ranging from considering the doctrine relevant for God's saving activity to regarding it as the most fundamental principle for every aspect of human life and community.<sup>47</sup>

*Jaesung Ryu received his Ph.D. from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA. He is currently an adjunct professor teaching Christian theology at Seoul Theological University in South Korea.*

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<sup>47</sup> It is virtually impossible to find Rahner's direct reference to Schleiermacher, particularly to Schleiermacher's trinitarian terms divine causality, love, and wisdom. However, like Schleiermacher, Rahner recognized the problem entailed in the use of the term "person" as suggesting three centers of consciousness. And to avoid this error, he unwittingly took the path taken by Schleiermacher, that is, relating the doctrine of the Trinity to the history of salvation in a post-Kantian way: "Indeed, the more boldly the treatise is aligned with the economy of salvation, the more likely it is to say the needful about the immanent Trinity, and make the truth really part of an understanding of the faith which is at once theoretical and existential." This very salvific logic of trinitarianism is not far from Schleiermacher's. Karl Rahner, "Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise: 'De Trinitate,'" in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. IV (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 99.

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